

5-1-2007

## What Now, Kemo Sabe?

Marcella David  
*The University of Iowa*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview>



Part of the [Law and Economics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Marcella David, *What Now, Kemo Sabe?*, 55 Buff. L. Rev. 307 (2007).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol55/iss1/6>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact [lawscholar@buffalo.edu](mailto:lawscholar@buffalo.edu).

## BOOK REVIEW

### What Now, Kemo Sabe?<sup>1</sup>

MARCELLA DAVID†

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN: WHY THE WEST'S EFFORTS TO AID THE REST HAVE DONE SO MUCH ILL AND SO LITTLE GOOD. By William Easterly. *The Penguin Press*, 2006. Pp. 1, 435. \$27.95.

New York University economics professor William Easterly is on a mission. His mission is framed as a reaction to Rudyard Kipling's poem, "White Man's Burden," in which Kipling exhorts his fellow white men to wage the war of peace by working to improve the lot of non-whites living in poverty, famine, and sickness.<sup>2</sup> In *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, Easterly argues that Kipling's racist and imperialistic views live on and taint the

---

† Professor of Law and International Studies, The University of Iowa. B.S., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1986; J.D., University of Michigan, 1989. Many thanks to the editors of the *Buffalo Law Review* for providing this opportunity, and Kimberly J. Carter and Kati Jumper for invaluable support services. Any errors are my own.

1. There is some confusion as to the meaning of "kemo sabe," a term popularized in the television show *The Lone Ranger*. For the purpose of this review, I rely on one widely available definition, "trusted friend." See Kemo Sabe, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kemo\\_sabe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kemo_sabe) (last visited Feb. 26, 2007) ("The origin of the phrase Kemo Sabe is a little vague. Some reports indicate it is an old Native American name meaning 'trusted friend'").

2. See *infra* notes 35-36 and accompanying text.

efforts of the current development movement. A special target for Easterly's criticism is Columbia University's Jeffrey D. Sachs, advisor to the United Nations and author of *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*.<sup>3</sup> A fellow economist, Sachs has, according to some, laid out a "clear conceptual map," and an "integrated set of solutions to the interwoven economic, political, environmental, and social problems that challenge the world's poorest countries."<sup>4</sup> As Sachs and others<sup>5</sup> lay out bigger and bigger plans for promoting global economic development and alleviating poverty, Easterly's desperate message is *it won't work*.<sup>6</sup> He accuses Sachs and others highly positioned in the development movement of stubbornly refusing to change methodologies for delivering development assistance, even in the face of what Easterly characterizes as past, massive failures.<sup>7</sup> Easterly implies that Sachs, like Kipling, is relying on a paternalistic paradigm that privileges white, Western assessments of how to solve problems in developing countries; the plans that result are top-heavy and inefficient, and yield results that are fleeting and of minimal impact.<sup>8</sup> Instead of planning the future of those in developing countries from the lofty and distant confines of the ivory tower, to be executed by mindless corps of bureaucratic lackeys, Sachs should listen more closely to the voices of those actually in the developing countries, the "Searchers" who have good ideas for low level boosts to their economic futures, but whose voices are drowned out by the dominant voices of "Planners," such as Sachs.<sup>9</sup>

---

3. See Jeffrey D. Sachs, *THE END OF POVERTY: ECONOMIC POSSIBILITIES FOR OUR TIME* (1st ed. 2005).

4. *Id.* (dust jacket description).

5. Also singled out are World Bank President James Wolfensohn, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bono, Sharon Stone, Bob Geldorf, and others. WILLIAM EASTERLY, *THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN: WHY THE WEST'S EFFORTS TO AID THE REST HAVE DONE SO MUCH ILL AND SO LITTLE GOOD* 3-30 (2006).

6. See, e.g., *id.* at 6 ("Jeffrey Sachs is an eloquent and compassionate man. I am always moved when I listen to him speak. Unfortunately, his intellectual solutions are less convincing").

7. See *id.* at 6, 9-11.

8. See *id.* at 11-18.

9. It should be noted that Sachs rejects Easterly's characterization of him as favoring central planning:

Easterly and Sachs have moved this debate from the sterile confines of academic conferences to the glamorous setting of pop culture; Sachs' book includes a forward by rock star Bono of U2; Easterly drops references—sometimes unflattering—to Bono and other activist pop icons throughout his book. Both books have been promoted in popular outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*; *The End of Poverty* is a *New York Times* bestselling book.

Easterly seems to have concluded that to more effectively connect with this broader audience, he has to pitch a simple, consistent message. Accordingly, he presents his theory in short soundbites and uses a liberal mix of anecdotes and success stories, usually personally observed, to demonstrate the merits of his Searcher-centric development model. It is in these segments of the book that Easterly is at his most compelling. By contrast, Easterly's economic analysis is simplistic, at times insultingly so; his examples of economic principles include his family's dinner choices and his children's lunchtime bartering practices.<sup>10</sup> Easterly's message is clearly calculated to reach readers, like the author of this review, whose interests lie more in policies for targeting aid, and who are less interested in and less familiar with economic theories that explain principles of development and growth. He doesn't want to inspire an army of economists to perform additional analysis of efficacy of international development aid—he wants to win the hearts and minds of those of us who might influence

---

Mr. Easterly also repeats his favorite canard that I believe in central planning. Anybody who is at all familiar with my life's work and writings knows that I believe in market-led and open economies and was a leading economic adviser on the conversion of the former Communist economies to market economies. I do not believe in pure laissez faire, however. Nor do I believe that an antipathy to foreign aid is correct at a time when millions of children are dying each year as a result of extreme poverty unattended by practical help from the rich countries.

Jeffrey D. Sachs, Letter to the Editor, *Vibrant Economies with High Taxes and High Social Welfare Spending*, WALL ST. J., Nov. 27, 2006 at A13, available at [http://www.nyu.edu/fas/institute/dri/Easterly/File/Sachs\\_Response\\_WSJ\\_112706.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/fas/institute/dri/Easterly/File/Sachs_Response_WSJ_112706.pdf). For additional exchanges between the authors, see William Easterly's website, <http://www.nyu.edu/fas/institute/dri/Easterly/SachsDebates.htm> (last visited Feb. 26, 2007).

10. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 72-75.

policy, and thus spark our defection from the ranks of the Planners to the ranks of the Searchers. Unfortunately, his effort is likely to have far less success than he hopes.

Does the economic research support Easterly's conclusion that efforts to date have failed and that a model empowering Searchers is more likely to yield results? *White Man's Burden* does not delve deeply enough into the subject for a reader who is unfamiliar with the economic literature to understand the issues on anything other than a superficial level.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as indifferent to economic principles as some might be, the fact that Easterly doesn't even make the effort to provide a more thoughtful discussion of the economic grounding for his discussion weakens his entire presentation, as does his similarly glossy treatment of political theory.

### I. BIG DREAMS, BIG PLANS, LITTLE PROGRESS: SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

Those who care about improving the living conditions of those in developing countries admit that there is still much work to be done.<sup>12</sup> Disease, poverty, and illiteracy continue virtually unabated, not withstanding the substantial amount of international aid and development assistance

---

11. Other reviews, readily available on the web, are far more authoritative than this review on this point. See, e.g., Amartya Sen, *The Man Without a Plan*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, Mar.-Apr. 2006, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060301fareviewessay85214/amartya-sen/the-man-without-a-plan.html>.

Perhaps the weakest link in Easterly's reasoning is his almost complete neglect of the distinctions between different types of economic problems. Easterly is well aware of the efficiency of market delivery when commodities are bought in a market and backed by suitable purchasing power, and he contrasts that with the usual infelicities and inefficiencies in getting aid to those who need it most. But the distinction between the two scenarios lies not only in the different ways of meeting the respective problems, but also in the nature of the problems themselves. There is something deeply misleading in the contrast he draws between them . . . .

*Id.*

12. Even Sachs, who has chided Easterly for failing to credit important progress made, agrees that more needs to be done. See Jeffrey D. Sachs, *How to Help the Poor: Piecemeal Progress or Strategic Plans*, 367 LANCET 1309 (2006), available at <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673606685619/fulltext>.

that has been provided to developing nations over the years.<sup>13</sup> While poor living conditions concern Easterly, what troubles him more is what he describes as a persistent failure by those providing the assistance to abandon their unsuccessful methods for the approach he suggests. This "second tragedy,"<sup>14</sup> argues Easterly, means that "the current wave of enthusiasm for addressing world poverty will repeat the cycle of its predecessors: idealism, high expectations, disappointing results, cynical backlash."<sup>15</sup>

Easterly, a former senior research fellow at the World Bank and currently a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, grounds his criticisms in authority and experience. He also imbues his work with passion and sincerity. As the child of academics, Easterly passed part of his youth in Ghana and takes the failure of development efforts to greatly advance the fortunes of Africa especially hard; his book includes a sampling of anecdotes, some personal, others stories of development projects that in Easterly's view demonstrate a success. Although many stories come from Africa, they all reveal his connection to, and affection and respect for, Searchers he has encountered in his life. It is in these parts of *White Man's Burden* that Easterly is at his best.<sup>16</sup> The use of anecdotes serves a purpose beyond providing context: these carefully selected stories of individuals who have beaten the odds and made a difference are designed to support Easterly's central thesis: that those running global development projects are "Planners," too distant from the actual people they are trying to help to listen to their ideas about what assistance is truly needed and the method of delivery that would be most effective. The people in the know, the savvy

---

13. Easterly puts the amount at \$2.3 trillion over five decades. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 4. While this is indeed a large sum, it is dwarfed by U.S. military commitments to Iraq over a four year period, estimated at \$351 billion. Letter from Peter Orszag, Director, Congressional Budget Office, to Kent Conrad, Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget tbl.1 (Feb. 26, 2007), available at <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/77xx/doc7793/02-07-CostOfWar.pdf> (estimating U.S. appropriations for Operation Iraqi Freedom at \$351 billion for 2003-2007). At this pace, U.S. commitments alone almost doubles the pace for spending.

14. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 4.

15. *Id.* at 5.

16. See, e.g., *id.* at 31-33.

consumers of foreign development assistance, Easterly calls "Searchers."

But who are the Searchers? In his dichotomous world,<sup>17</sup> Easterly defines Planners rather unhelpfully as "the advocates of the traditional approach" and Searchers as "the agents for change in the alternative approach."<sup>18</sup> Easterly offers no specific definition of Planners and Searchers. After reading *White Man's Burden*, one will only be able to distinguish a Planner from a Searcher by observing the behavior Easterly believes is characteristic of each category: Planners "don't motivate," "take no responsibility," "determine what to supply," "apply global blueprints" and "lack knowledge";<sup>19</sup> Searchers "find things that work," "accept responsibility," respond to demand, "adapt to local conditions," and "find out what the reality is at the bottom."<sup>20</sup> In other words, Planners are bogged down by big ideas, stunted imagination, and bulging bureaucracy; they waste money while untold numbers of Searchers, nimble, savvy entrepreneurs, lack the modest capital investment that would lead to real results. An example that Easterly gives of a successful Searcher is Mohammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank, who provided microcredit loans to support grassroots entrepreneurial efforts.<sup>21</sup> Yunus and Grameen were recognized with a Nobel Peace Prize for "their efforts to create economic and social development from below,"<sup>22</sup> a sentiment that exactly captures the spirit of Easterly's Searcher category, while offering no better direction on how to reliably predict how to replicate this success.

While neither "Planners" nor "Searchers" are defined with any specificity, the scant guidance as to who constitutes a Searcher is particularly problematic. The great detriment of the Planner/Searcher dichotomy is that

---

17. In addition to "Planners" and "Searchers," Easterly resorts to "the West" and "the Rest." *Id.* at 8; see also *id.* at 11 ("How can the West end poverty in the Rest?").

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.* at 5-6.

20. *Id.*

21. *Id.* at 58-59.

22. Nobel Laureates 2006, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/lists/2006.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/lists/2006.html) (last visited Feb. 26, 2007).

Easterly's characterization of someone as a Searcher, by definition someone who has "found things that work," will always prove Easterly's hypothesis. Searchers get things done. How will we know them? They are the people getting things done! To have a winning theory, Easterly doesn't have to know how to identify a likely successful Searcher, just congratulate him or her for being successful (and supporting his theory). Telling in this regard is that Easterly has no catchy name for unsuccessful Searchers, those entrepreneurial low-level folks who have bad ideas and squander opportunities to make a difference.

A reader can't help but wonder if we can truly depend on Searchers to drive meaningful change. Can we reliably choose the right Searchers to support, and count on their judgment? Easterly's use of a pop culture icon to illustrate the certain benefits of his alternative approach instead underscores the problems of identifying likely successful Searchers and the questionable wisdom of relying on Searchers for meaningful change. Easterly rather glibly points to the magical success of the Harry Potter franchise, which he argues wasn't Planned, but, rather, is the story of a successful Searcher, "a Scottish single mother on welfare,"<sup>23</sup> who "found something that worked," and became one of the richest women in the world. "The short answer on why dying poor children don't get twelve-cent medicines, while healthy rich children do get Harry Potter, is that twelve-cent medicines are supplied by Planners while Harry Potter is supplied by Searchers."<sup>24</sup> The comparison is, of course, absurd. The distribution of Harry Potter books, movies, games, and action figures isn't un-Planned; it is an immense, transnational marketing effort that depends on convincing children they want something that they don't need, in hopes that they, in turn, will convince their parents, grandparents (or in this author's case, doting godmother) to spend even more money on the franchise. The success of this marketing blitz offers weak evidence of the viability of Easterly's approach for another reason: J.K. Rowling, as a "single mother on welfare," had the support of a massive bureaucratic enterprise (Scottish welfare) to back up her searching; why isn't this success a credit to the

---

23. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 7.

24. *Id.* at 5.



Planners in the Scottish welfare system? Finally the sad stories of countless hopeful writers underscores the futility of depending on Searchers to reliably anticipate what will be a hit with the Rest any more than the Planners will.

In fact, Easterly is not at all allergic to big plans; he actually argues in favor of big bureaucratic plans throughout his book, arguing for example that aid agencies should not only build schools but train and pay the teachers, and not only build roads but pay to maintain them.<sup>25</sup> One can't help but imagine the creation of UN-ROAD (United Nations Road Open Assistance Development Programme) and the same cycle of "idealism, high expectations, disappointing results, cynical backlash"<sup>26</sup> that Easterly worries will result from every other Plan. And Easterly does little to explain why, if we believe everything else he says about Planners, we should trust them to accomplish this. These types of inconsistencies create tension throughout Easterly's discussion of the merits of Searching over Planning. For example, he argues in favor of specialization of development efforts: instead of "fixing country X," agencies should have narrow specific goals, with benchmarks, such as "fixing the roads in country X,"<sup>27</sup> eschewing the model of consolidation and cost reduction currently followed by some of the biggest players in the corporate markets. In a country in the Rest of the world, this type of specialization would seem guaranteed to generate overlapping bureaucracy and waste. Similarly, his argument in favor of free market support for Searchers seems guaranteed to generate duplication and confusion, and the same inefficiencies of coordinated Plans. These points demonstrate that Easterly is not really the maverick he claims to be; he too finds it hard to free himself from familiar constructs and difficult to avoid the same pitfalls.

To be fair, Easterly recognizes that there is much to be done to turn his theory into a viable blueprint for moving forward. He excuses his failure to offer a concrete alternative in part by arguing that "[t]he right plan is to

---

25. *See id.* at 189-90.

26. *Id.* at 5.

27. *See id.* at 190; *see also id.* at 175-76 (describing a successful project in Bangladesh).

have no plan.”<sup>28</sup> This rhetoric is not only self-serving but disingenuous. Successfully re-distributing billions, millions, or even thousands of dollars in aid to the grassroots Searchers can’t be accomplished without a plan—a Big Plan. Easterly’s pathological abhorrence of planning here leads him to fail the cause of the Searchers; he offers a theory with no viable methodology for implementation. These questions might be resolved with some thought, but they don’t seem to even occur to Easterly.

If one focuses solely on Easterly’s dominant message, that the way forward is to put more resources in the hands of Searchers, there are many important questions to be asked, in addition to how the resources are to make it from the hands of the Planners such as the World Bank or USAID, and into the hands of the Searchers. If the Searchers must set goals and be accountable, how are those efforts supposed to be judged? Should all Searchers be supported, no matter how modest the effort? While one can imagine providing support to a person who wants to start a microcredit organization, how is one to judge the merits of a Searcher who advocates, from the bottom-up perspective Easterly supports, that what the community needs is a new children’s novel, and that, as a Searcher/Writer, they should be provided the support to write that novel? How should we judge the Searcher who presents a compelling model for stimulating economic growth with a homegrown pornography industry? If they are correct, they will generate the economic boost that Easterly favors. Are all these Searchers created equal?

One can fairly conclude that Easterly would answer that last question “yes,” since he posits that Searchers should be supported because they are more likely to be successful than Planners at doing two things: effectively delivering assistance to the poor<sup>29</sup> and identifying entrepreneurial projects that will stimulate the economy,

---

28. *Id.* at 5; see also *id.* at 367 (“If you think I will now offer a utopian blueprint to fix aid’s complex problems, then I have done a really bad job in the previous chapters at explaining the problems with utopian blueprints.”); *id.* at 156 (“Any of these changes should be tried in a gradual, piecemeal, experimental way.”).

29. See, e.g., *id.* at 13-14.

improving the situation for all.<sup>30</sup> For Easterly, the Searcher who figures out a better way to deliver mosquito nets or schoolbooks is a good Searcher, as is the person who figures out that investing \$5,000 in a proper bathroom will keep more post-puberty girls in school. And any Searcher who creates a business empire is a good Searcher,<sup>31</sup> even the Chinese woman who quits teaching school to set up a sock-making enterprise.<sup>32</sup> Whether she pays a living wage or treats her workers well appears to not be important, nor is the relative social benefits of educating the young over making cheap socks for foreigners; her contribution to the development bottom line is apparently all that matters.

## II. OVERLY BURDENED

As noted, the inspiration for the title of Easterly's book is Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden."<sup>33</sup> As excerpted by Easterly, Kipling (also a Nobel Laureate)<sup>34</sup> urges the West to:

Take up the White Man's Burden—  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain.  
To seek another's profit,  
And work another's gain.  
Take up the White Man's burden—  
The savage wars of peace—  
Fill full the mouth of famine  
And bid the sickness cease.<sup>35</sup>

The quoted stanzas, like other parts of the poem, reveal the

---

30. See, e.g., *id.* at 27-28.

31. See generally *id.* at 341-66 (discussing examples).

32. See *id.* at 353.

33. RUDYARD KIPLING, *The White Man's Burden*, in *THE FIVE NATIONS* 79-81 (1903).

34. See Rudyard Kipling: The Nobel Prize in Literature, 1907, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1907/kipling-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1907/kipling-bio.html) (last visited Feb. 26, 2007).

35. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 3.

arrogance of the West as they swoop in to save the Rest from ignorance and deprivation, "in patience." The missing section of the second quoted stanza goes on,

And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hope to nought.<sup>36</sup>

revealing in turn the notions of racial and religious superiority that also motivated Kipling and his contemporaries. By invoking Kipling, Easterly tacitly accuses the Planners of the same racist and imperialistic tendencies. Although he claims to respect the "goodwill and compassion" of the Planners,<sup>37</sup> that does little to ameliorate the harsh indictment of racism, which Easterly subtly underscores by emphasizing the time that he has spent in Africa, both as a child and in his professional career. Easterly is one of the people; the Planners are the evil outsiders.

Racism exists, and if that is the factor that is causing Planners to discount the voices of the Searchers in favor of bureaucracy and incompetence, then Easterly would be right to call the Planners out for it. Instead he points to no evidence of bias, leaving the insidious insinuation to fester. But are the claims of racism and imperialism fair? If so, has Easterly himself escaped the trap of the "White Man's Burden"?

To be fairly accused of imperialistic arrogance, we would expect Planners to plan from afar, in disregard of the concerns of the Rest. Easterly certainly suggests that that is the case, but in reality the truth is more complicated. Planners spend a lot of time in the countries they assist and work with local agents all the time: government officials, local aid agencies, non-profits, and activists. Easterly does not explain how Planners, who are in a position to listen to those "on the bottom" or to their representatives, should be faulted for arrogance. Is it that only Searchers can fairly

---

36. KIPLING, *supra* note 33, at 80.

37. EASTERLY, *supra* note 5, at 4. ("I feel like kind of a Scrooge pointing out the second tragedy when there is so much goodwill and compassion among so many people to help the poor.").

convey a Searcher agenda? Are local voices that advocate or participate in "Planning" necessarily corrupt, tainted by the Planners? Should the contributions of local state actors be dismissed wholesale because we suspect they are motivated by self interest, or uniformly elite and too distant from the grass roots? These questions require more thoughtful treatment.

Beyond the accusation of imperialism, or perhaps because of it, Easterly must certainly be untainted by the same imperialistic tendencies. Whether he is depends on whether one takes Easterly's criticisms at a micro or macro level. On the micro level, Easterly takes Planners to task because of problems in their plans for delivering aid; here Easterly's criticisms have the most appeal, and some of the suggestions have merit: local accountability, local initiatives, broader experimentation, and impartial evaluation are good ideas,<sup>38</sup> if one can create a viable mechanism for identifying and connecting Searchers and solve the problems of duplication and impaired coordination that might result from shifting the funding emphasis of Planners in the way Easterly suggests, and in a way that empowers a local, indigenous perspective. By comparison, the implementation of Plans, to the extent that they are shaped and directed from afar, might fairly subject Planners to Easterly's charges. From the micro perspective, like Kipling, Planners may be fairly criticized for assuming that white men indeed know what is best for the heathen masses.

However, to completely repudiate Kipling, one would have to be able to listen to the Searchers without any "planned" agenda serving as a filter. But Easterly is not neutral; in fact, in his understanding of the best policies for advancement, Easterly is no different from the Planners. Easterly fully believes in the principles and goals that underlie the Planners' agenda: indeed he spends chapters explaining why democracy, capitalism, and free markets are the best paths to development and prosperity. In the case of China and Singapore, which have made significant economic strides *without* being democracies, Easterly seems to hold out the hope that economic success will *lead* to more

---

38. *Id.* at 382.

democratization.<sup>39</sup> Thus, like the Planners he criticizes, Easterly is convinced that democracy and development are closely linked and offer the best chance for making the Rest successful. Where Easterly differs from the Planners is his method in achieving those goals;<sup>40</sup> he would fund the grass-roots entrepreneurial efforts that he believes would stimulate interest in property rights and, therefore, democracy and progress. In advocating a model that operates in the same ideological framework as the Planners', is Easterly merely asking the Rest to trade one white man's yoke for another?

### III. CHOOSING DEMOCRACY AS A PATH TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

While much is made of the Planner/Searcher divide, a great deal of Easterly's book is devoted to setting forth what he believes are truths about the development movement. These truths, which he claims are obvious, are many and, at times, in tension with each other. The most dominant themes might fairly be identified as these:

- A "big push" of development funding does not guarantee economic growth;<sup>41</sup>
- Bad government is a cause for development programs' failure;<sup>42</sup>
- Foreign aid efforts need to have defined benchmarks and critical assessment;<sup>43</sup> and
- Democracy and good government can stimulate economic growth.<sup>44</sup>

If these truths are indeed "true," and therefore in a sense neutral, then Easterly should not be faulted for

---

39. "While I think that free markets and democracy are a big part of the success story of the West, countries sometimes take a circuitous route to get there, or they may conceivably have their own recipe." *Id.* at 347.

40. It is worth emphasizing that Easterly strongly opposes imposing democratic structures, militarily or otherwise, as ineffectual and counterproductive. *See generally id.* at 311-36 (discussing examples).

41. *See id.* at 38-41.

42. *See id.* at 42-44.

43. *See id.* at 15-17.

44. *See id.* at 115-43.

favoring them, and neither should the Planners, just as one should not fault a Western doctor who works to eradicate infibulation (the most severe form of female genital surgery) as being imperialistic, even as we hope that she designs her campaign in a culturally sensitive manner. But how "true" is the case for democracy, free markets, and capitalism as the best paths to prosperity? More to the point, how compelling is Easterly's case that these political and economic models offer the best hope?

Again, Easterly's analysis is less than compelling. For example, he relies on "one big historical experiment"<sup>45</sup> as proof of the theory that "[a] democracy with equal rights for everyone will do better giving opportunities to the Searchers, whom we need to get the new sectors to emerge."<sup>46</sup> The "big historical experiment" is the European colonization of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa,<sup>47</sup> or in other words, "the settlement of relatively rich Europeans as a minority group among poor indigenous people,"<sup>48</sup> and awarding themselves "a monopoly of political power and privileged access to land and education."<sup>49</sup> Easterly suggests that these oligarchic, anti-democratic governing structures stifled economic growth in those countries.<sup>50</sup> This is an incomplete analysis; fair or not, those colonized nations were subsumed within the political and economic structures of their European sponsors. To say that those countries, now independent, have failing economies is as convincing as it would be to grant West Virginia independence from the Union and then chastise its government for "wasting" its coal resources. The coal of West Virginia helped fuel—literally and figuratively—the economic success of the United States, just as the natural resources and cheap labor of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa contributed to the ongoing economic success of European states. In some instances the current prosperity

---

45. *Id.* at 126.

46. *Id.* at 121. Easterly ascribes this theory to Daron Acemoglu of MIT. *Id.*

47. *Id.* at 126.

48. *Id.*

49. *Id.*

50. "Although the white minority societies account for only a small part of poor countries today, they illustrate a general problem of oligarchy that is far more widespread." *Id.*

of now democratic European states is surely a legacy of colonization. By focusing narrowly on past colonial governing structures and ignoring the wealth transfer aspects of colonization, Easterly presents an incomplete and distorted picture of the relationship between governance and prosperity—or, in the case of these former colonies, their lack of prosperity.

More problematic than the telephoto lens that Easterly uses to frame this global picture is his glossy characterization of “democracies.” In the same passage expounding on the “big historical experiment,” he offers as a counter-example Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, “democratic places with a large majority of the population European.”<sup>51</sup> Comparing aggregate income levels in the colonizing European oligarchies in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa to that of these “democratic” states from 1820 to 2000, Easterly notes that “these democratic countries dramatically outperformed the economies of oligarchy over the next two centuries. . . . oligarchy can perform well for a while, but tends to stagnate eventually.”<sup>52</sup> Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States repressed their citizens, variously offering limited or no rights to those not owning land, indentured servants, women, indigenous persons, and slaves. They were perhaps the most advanced democracies of their time, but they don’t measure up to contemporary standards, and it seems odd to cite them, particularly in reference to 1820-1920, as helpful examples showing how democracy correlates positively with development. In fact, Easterly’s chart seems to indicate that from 1975, when civil rights were substantially expanded in each of the four example “democratic” states, both the “democratic” and former European oligarchy states show similar levels of income growth.<sup>53</sup> One could conclude, therefore, that repressing the rights of a substantial segment of the population, by a oligarchy or limited democratic state, will

---

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.* at 126-27.

53. *See id.* at 127 fig.14. The reference to these states as “mostly European” effectively renders invisible their indigenous populations and the slave population of the United States.



provide a platform for economic growth. Or not.<sup>54</sup> Certainly the question requires a thoughtful analysis.

Persons in developing countries often complain that the United States is trying to impose contemporaneous standards from a position of privilege: we argue that children should not work when our domestic food industry was built on the backs of family farms; we argue for political rights for minorities and women when we refused them those rights for centuries; we argue for religious tolerance and freedom of speech while refusing to acknowledge that those rights were very narrowly read until recently; we argue for non-proliferation when we have the bomb; we argue that economic success depends on property rights although our economic success rests on the foundation of chattel slavery, grounded in the principle that a person could be stripped of the right to control the fruits of their labor simply because of the color of their skin. No Western state can claim that its economic success is the result of the kind of "democracy" that is currently pushed by Planners and Easterly alike. Yet Easterly argues nonetheless that democracy is the best course. In this regard, the distance between Easterly and the Planners, and Easterly and Kipling, is not as wide as he would like to believe.

#### IV. WHAT NOW, KEMO SABE?

In the 1980s, popular discourse framed the relationship between the Lone Ranger and Tonto as exploitative; after all, it was said, "tonto" means stupid and "kemo sabe" was understood to mean "one who knows." Surely, it was argued, this choice of language was a cruel racist joke by the show's creators.<sup>55</sup>

The truth is more complicated. "Tonto" is, in fact, a word that means "stupid"—in Spanish. There was, reportedly, a band of Apaches that called themselves "Tonto"; while the television character was supposed to be

---

54. Easterly seems to believe that ethnic and class stratification interferes with progress, which makes it all the more curious that he used the "big experiment" to support his analysis.

55. There can be no formal citation to this discussion other than the recollection of the author of this review.

Potawatomi, current belief is that the creators drew upon diverse experiences to create an amalgam Indian, and were perhaps ethnically insensitive, but not pernicious in their intent. Finally, "kemo sabe," which Tonto and the Lone Ranger used to refer to each other, means "trusted friend." With a little explanation, both the Lone Ranger and the show's creators are transformed from uncaring and racist to well meaning, if, at times, inept and insensitive.

While reading Easterly's book, a reader can only wonder if the story of development, as it continues to unfold, will undergo a similar transformation.<sup>56</sup> Will Planners be vindicated over the long run, or recognized by history as squandering precious resources by stubbornly refusing to adapt to new realities? Do we have the time to wait to develop a plan to identify the best Searchers and support their efforts? If we do support those efforts, how long before micro-economic efforts will yield results on the macro scale? For example, can we afford to suspend even flawed plans to distribute twelve-cent medicines to poor dying children until such time as a Searcher comes up with a more effective way to distribute them? How do we hold Searchers accountable? Other reviewers note that Easterly raises more questions than he does answers, and for this reason, as well as his harsh and unrelenting rhetoric,<sup>57</sup> one might be tempted to dismiss *The White Man's Burden* out of hand.

There are good lessons to be learned from Easterly. His suggestions of permanently funding some infrastructure, like roads and education, are indeed somewhat inconsistent with his advocacy for smaller, leaner projects based on

---

56. It is worth noting that the timeframe for the "big historical experiment" spanned a two hundred year period. *Id.* at 126. In describing the foundations of Japanese economic success, Easterly starts his clock in 1870. *Id.* at 341. By contrast, the experiment of modern development efforts date from the mid-1940s.

57. Easterly isn't content to just suggest the Planners have bad motives; he disparages their efforts in a way that makes it easy to dismiss his message. Whether or not Easterly is correct in his assessment of Sharon Stone's call for funding to distribute mosquito nets as doomed to failure, his reference to the donors as "largely middle aged males," *id.* at 13, and the unmistakable suggestion that Stone is just another pretty face (at best) or trading on her looks (worse) or even prostituting herself (worse still) is just one instance of the gratuitous baiting that permeates the first chapter of his book and detracts from his message.

grassroots ideas, but they are interesting ideas nonetheless and worth exploring. His call for more rigorous benchmarks and independent assessment are also worth further discussion, even as we continue to challenge his hypothesis and develop a workable plan for constructively engaging Searchers.